

Rationale for Unit Accreditation and Enhanced Program Review Accreditation System

At its best, an accreditation system should ensure public accountability, assure quality in an institution and its programs, foster on-going program improvement, and ensure adherence to commonly agreed to standards. The structure of an accreditation system should help realize these objectives.

Currently, California's accreditation system involves a single accreditation decision for the institution – unit accreditation. The individual programs are reviewed within the process of coming to the institution's accreditation decision.

The work group recommends maintaining a unit accreditation system but enhancing the program review process within that system.

Proposed Rationale:

A unit based accreditation model recognizes that, ultimately, the “unit” is responsible for the quality and effectiveness of each and every one of its programs. Under this system, the quality of any one program offered by an institution can affect the overall outcome of the institution's accreditation status. A unit based approach to accreditation fosters greater coherence and collaboration within an institution as diverse programs work together to develop a common vision for the institution, its programs, and its students; a common set of goals; and shared responsibility by all that the quality of each of its individual programs reflect upon the quality of all its programs and upon the institution more broadly. The shared responsibility that results from a unit accreditation approach provides program leadership with leverage to gain assistance from leadership within schools and departments to implement improvements where needed; it provides schools of education leadership with leverage with institutional leadership to assist where improvements may be needed; and provides institutional leadership with the leverage needed with faculty, departments, schools, or trustees, that they need to enact change.

The Commission on Teacher Credentialing is also responsible for the oversight of individual credential programs authorizing individuals to work in California's public schools. It is imperative to its charge that its accreditation system allows for the thorough review of each of an institution's program offerings. A unit based accreditation structure

should never stand in the way of illuminating issues or concerns about individual programs. An enhanced model that accredits and holds the unit responsible for the quality of all its programs, while ensuring appropriate attention and follow up to individual program issues or weaknesses promises to be the type of structure most responsive to the needs of California's educational system.

Unit Accreditation and Enhanced Program Review System

Unit Accreditation: The team will make a single accreditation recommendation to the COA. A unit based approach to accreditation fosters greater coherence and collaboration within an institution as diverse programs work together to develop a common vision for the institution, its programs, and its students; a common set of goals; and shared responsibility by all that the quality of each of its individual programs reflect upon the quality of all its programs and upon the institution more broadly. Within the Unit Accreditation, there is an option for individual programs to be approved,

Program Review: The program clusters will complete a thorough review of each of the institution's programs. The team members assigned to the program(s) will make a finding for each of the standards that govern the program(s) and make recommendations about the standards and program status to the full accreditation team. The full accreditation team will recommend findings that may include institutional (required) follow-up within the period prescribed by the COA. The program review will allow a focused examination of each standard in each program allowing the team members to identify strengths and areas for growth.

NOTE: Program decisions will be considered in the unit accreditation decision, but the specific guidelines that describe how the individual program decisions are factored into the unit accreditation decision have not yet been developed.